

**Amendments To The Claims:**

Claim 1. (Currently amended) A stent in a non-expanded state, comprising:

a first expansion column including individual first expansion struts forming a plurality of first expansion strut pairs, at least a portion of each first expansion strut pair having a stair-step region, two adjacent first expansion strut pairs share a common strut;

a second expansion column including individual second expansion struts forming a plurality of second expansion strut pairs, at least a portion of each second expansion strut pair having a stair-step region, two adjacent second expansion strut pairs share a common strut;

a first connecting strut column including a plurality of non-intersecting individual first connecting struts that couple only the first and second expansion columns, wherein each of an individual first connecting strut includes a proximal section and a distal section, at least a portion of the proximal section of each first connecting strut extending from a portion of the stair-step region of one of the first expansion struts, at least a portion of the distal section of each first connecting strut extending from a portion of the stair-step region of one of the second expansion struts,

each proximal section having a longitudinal axis and each distal section having a longitudinal axis, at least one of the longitudinal axis of each proximal section and the longitudinal axis of the distal section being parallel with at least one of a longitudinal axis of each first expansion strut and a longitudinal axis of each second expansion strut.

Claim 2. (Original) The stent of claim 1, wherein each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column has a stair-step configuration.

Claim 3. (Original) The stent of claim 1, wherein one expansion strut of an expansion strut pair of the first expansion column has a stair-step segment at a proximal end and a stair-step segment at a distal end.

Claim 4. (Original) The stent of claim 3, wherein the other expansion strut of the expansion strut pair of the first expansion column is a straight segment.

Claim 5. (Original) The stent of claim 4, wherein one expansion strut of an expansion strut pair of the second expansion column has a stair-step segment at a distal end and a stair-step segment at a proximal end.

Claim 6. (Original) The stent of claim 5, wherein the other expansion strut of the expansion strut pair of the second expansion column is a straight segment.

Claim 7. (Original) The stent of claim 1, wherein the proximal section of each first connecting strut has an edge that is a linear extension of an edge of an expansion strut in the first expansion column, and the distal section of each first connecting strut has an edge that is a linear extension of an edge of an expansion strut in the second expansion column.

Claim 8. (Original) The stent of claim 7, wherein a strain relief notch is formed where the edge of the proximal section of each first connecting strut in the first connecting strut column is conjoined with the edge of the expansion strut of the first expansion column, and a strain relief notch is formed where the edge of the distal section of each first connecting strut in the first connecting strut column is conjoined with edge of the expansion strut of the second expansion column.

Claim 9. (Original) The stent of claim 1, wherein the distal section of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column has a greater length than its proximal section.

Claim 10. (Original) The stent of claim 1, wherein each first connecting strut of the first connecting column is ipsilaterally conjoined to the first and second expansion columns.

Claim 11. (Canceled)

Claim 12. (Original) The stent of claim 1, wherein the longitudinal axis of the proximal section of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column is non-parallel to the longitudinal axis of its distal section.

Claim 13. (Original) The stent of claim 1, wherein each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column includes an intermediate section coupled to the proximal and distal sections of the first connecting strut.

Claim 14. (Original) The stent of claim 13, wherein the intermediate section of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column has a greater length than a length of its proximal section.

Claim 15. (Original) The stent of claim 13, wherein at least a portion of the intermediate section of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column has a curvilinear geometric configuration.

Claim 16. (Original) The stent of claim 15, wherein at least a portion of the proximal and distal sections of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column have a curvilinear geometric configuration.

Claim 17. (Original) The stent of claim 13, wherein the intermediate section of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column has a longitudinal axis that is nonparallel to a longitudinal axis of the stent.

Claim 18. (Original) The stent of claim 13, wherein the intermediate section of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column has a longitudinal axis that is positioned diagonally relative to a longitudinal axis of the stent.

Claim 19. (Original) The stent of claim 13, wherein the intermediate section of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column has a longitudinal axis that extends in a vertically diagonal direction relative to a longitudinal axis of the stent.

Claim 20. (Original) The stent of claim 13, wherein at least a portion of the intermediate section of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column is in close proximity to

an expansion strut pair of the first expansion column.

**Claim 21. (Original)** The stent of claim 1, wherein a width of the proximal section of each first connecting strut in the first connecting strut column is less than a width of the expansion strut of the first expansion column, and a width of the distal section of each first connecting strut of the first connecting strut column is less than a width of the expansion strut of the second expansion column.

**Claim 22. (Original)** The stent of claim 1, further comprising:

a plurality of expansion columns coupled by a plurality of connecting strut columns.

**Claim 23. (Original)** The stent of claim 1, further comprising:

a third expansion column including individual expansion struts forming a plurality of expansion strut pairs, wherein two adjacent expansion strut pairs share a common strut;

a second connecting strut column including a plurality of non-intersecting individual second connecting struts that couple only the second and third expansion columns, wherein each of an individual second connecting strut of the second connecting strut column includes a proximal section with a longitudinal axis that is parallel with a longitudinal axis of an expansion strut in the second expansion column, and a distal section with a longitudinal axis that is parallel with a longitudinal axis of an expansion strut of the third expansion column.

**Claims 24-30. (Cancelled)**